Children’s Gamification and Storytelling as tools for Understanding and Instilling Values:
A guide for Coaches, Educators and Parents in the use of “Value of Values” and “Magic Carpet and the Islands of Values”

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Abstract

This paper intends to serve as a guide to parents, educators and professional coaches in instilling values in children via game playing (gamification), storytelling and tales. The central piece of the paper is a tale that has been carefully crafted to provide an interesting adventurous journey that capture children’s attention. Albeit its simplicity, the story is very empowering: it is about three young children, members of the same family, who join a magic flying carpet into three different islands. At the end of each journey/island, the children learn an important lesson about some values. At the end, they learn a lot about each other, and about the need to balance values in life in order to be happy and healthy (economically, socially and emotionally). The “value of values” card game, as well as the “Magic Carpet and the Islands of Values,” is based on many years of research into the world of values and its underlying “3Es Tri-axial model”\(^1\) (Dolan et al., 2006; Dolan, 2011)\(^2\).

Keywords
Story telling, values, coaching, children

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“There is a growing concern among conscientious parents that our children are caught up in materialism to the detriment of character. They are picking up values that place personal gain before ethics, integrity, or love. Many of them have little or no sense of faith or spiritual values in their lives. Virtues are the silver thread running through all of humanity’s sacred literature as well as the oral traditions of the world’s indigenous peoples. (We) view children as spiritual beings whose purpose in life is to have a life of purpose-to-develop all the virtues they have within them in potential.”

Linda Kavelin Popov
The family Virtues Guide

Introduction

Instilling values in our children is one of the most important aspects of parenting. We, as parents, often quietly sit and observe the world and all it has to offer our families. Many times, we come away from our observations uneasy and fearful for the future of our children and all that they will experience one day. Many of us sit back and hope for a change, others express their concerns with close friends and family members; some parents say a simple prayer.

While all of these are important to the support of our concerns, there is more we can do. As parents, we can lay the ultimate foundation for the future of our children. We can help make the changes in the world that we all ultimately wish. We can start setting this change in motion by instilling values in our children.

There are multiple ways that we can instill values in our children. Whatever the way parents prefer for instilling the values, the first stage is to clarify what are the values we believe in and want to pass to our children. In order to do that, Dolan and Landau have invented a simple card game that can be used effectively to find out “what is important” and have proposed a plan of action derived from this family playing educational game. Throughout this game we can see the value that we place on certain things, and this becomes clear to our children. If they see that we take pride in particular values, and we are dedicated to certain things, they will do the same. It is often said that children

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3 The card game is labeled, “The Value of Values.” More information on the game can be found at: www.learning-about-values.com; for the guide on how to use the game in various settings, you can download a simple guide named: “What's Really important - The Importance of Values,” at: http://www.equity-mds.com/What's_Really_Important_the_English_Version_March%203,12.pdf
learn by example. We believe that is very true. Remember: If you place a high priority on your values, your children will learn to do the same.

It is also important to note that while many children attend school outside home, their education does not stop there. It has been found that as far as values are concerned, children learn more from the home, rather than in the classroom. Ellis and Morgan (2013) have created in 2009 the “Family Values Scheme,” which helps engage families to participate in a series of fun tasks and challenges around 22 basic values. The Family Values Scheme is designed to enhance the effectiveness of key relationships between and among family members: Good, caring relationships are a key ingredient within the family unit as they encompass such skills as the ability to listen, communicate, recognize and respond to the needs and feelings of others. The reason behind it has to do with government guidelines for the content of education, which not necessarily includes an emphasis on value-based education. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but the budget does not often allow for the nurturing of individual development and teaching important life skills. There are, of course, some exceptions, but they are very limited. The Brahma Kumaris, for example, incorporates 12 values (unity, peace, happiness, hope, humility, simplicity, trust, freedom, cooperation, honesty, courage, love) as their core values, and children assume and learn from projects connected with these values. There are probably more schools like this throughout the globe.

But, by and large, instilling values is left to the family and contexts out of school. Thus, it is utmost important to start instilling values in children at early age. Most childhood education experts agree that building a child's character must begin at preschool age. During this period, children can be easily shaped and guided to learn about what is right and what is wrong, and to learn to live a value-filled life. They can easily absorb and emulate what they see and hear from the adults in their surroundings. In this guide we propose an effective instrument for parents (and coaches) to use in instilling values in young children.

Storytelling and game playing is perhaps the most powerful way that human beings organize experience. Some have argued that narrative thinking is the optimum form of thinking for learning and expressing what we know about ourselves and about other

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people (Bruner, 1986⁵, Schank 1990⁶). By the time most children are 3 or 4 years old, they can tell many kinds of stories: autobiography, fiction, and reports they have overheard. Then, when they are 6 to 10 years old, they can tell stories with other people, and to other people. By the time most children are adolescents, stories, form natural conversations and become part of daily life. In adulthood, narratives provide a form for organizing huge amounts of information and serve a host of powerful psychological and social functions. Thus, the foundations and the values engrained in each of us can be traced to the first 3 to 7 years. Let’s expand a bit on it.

At early stage, children are attentive and responsive observers to their parents’ tales. They not only watch their parent’s face carefully as he or she tells stories of personal experience, they nod, repeat a word now and then as a way of showing interest. They also do this to keeping the parent going, and respond with emotion, sometimes anticipating emotion in a well-learned story. An interesting detail that will be familiar to any adult who has spent a great deal of time with the same child is that children love to hear the same story over and over again. From a cognitive as well as emotional perspective, it also gives the child a chance to internalize the story and master the pieces. At later stage, children begin to participate, adding elements to the story, taking on greater pieces of the authorial responsibility. Later on, children can tell a whole story by themselves, or contribute pieces to a parent’s story that the parent did not even know about.

Stories provide children with ideas and models on which to base their own life and experiences. They help children to make sense of the world around them, expanding their knowledge of cultural and social diversity. Stories provide children with a context for learning, and it is particularly important in differentiating values, such as “good” from “bad or evil,” “right” from “wrong,” as well as other distinctions.

One of the most important things about tales is that children enjoy them; it is almost impossible to teach uninterested children. Also, consider how many morals are included, not only in modern stories, but fairytales as well; concepts such as always listening to your parents, being nice to animals, protecting the environment, being nice to each other, not to talk to strangers, etc. Thus, tales and stories are an excellent way of teaching children how to act in the world around them.

Most parents want to transfer their deeply held values to their children, whether it is a sense of personal responsibility, generosity to those who are less fortunate, an appetite for risk or for entrepreneurship, the pursuit of education, or other personal traits. Parents generally want to instill within their children the values they strongly believe in. While most, if not all parents, strive to accomplish this, they do not go to a formal school that trains them to become a “professional parent”; also, most parents do not have the “tools” that allow them to do the task of becoming a good parent. Some believe that this comes naturally once we bear children. But, serious analysis shows very clearly that this is not the case. This is the reason that Dolan & Singh have prepared a beautifully illustrated tale that focuses on values. In the remainder of the guide, we will explain the objectives of the tale, its underlying assumptions and model, and discuss some possible ways of using it as an effective coaching tool for parents in instilling positive values in their children.

“Magic carpet and the Islands of Values” in a snapshot

Actually, the tale is very simple. It tells the story of a young sister (Izzie, 7 years old) and her two brothers: 10-year-old Rob (the eldest), and 4-year-old Ben (the youngest). They were taken on a trip with a talking magic, flying carpet. Their adventure includes observations and dialogue with inhabitants of three distinct islands. They have learned that on each island the inhabitants cherished only one category of values, and ignore or disregard all other values. The three islands reflect the personalities and the behavior of these kids. They have ended their magic journey with some instrumental conclusions based on their experience.

How to read the tale with your children

The underlying concept for the tale is Dolan’s “3Es Tri-axial model of values,” that emphasizes the importance of juggling and balancing our value system. According to Dolan, a working adult that can clearly identify his or her values and align them with life or work objectives can lead to success in the life of business and the business of life. Dolan divides the value system into three subsystems, each represented in the tale by

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an island. The first subsystem is the “Workman’s Island.” This subsystem includes Economic-Pragmatic values: values that help achieve goals, such as excellence, planning and persistence. Reading about the experience of the characters visiting this island, the young reader goes through two lessons: (1) the necessity of behaving by pragmatic values and (2) realizing that living only by pragmatic values is not sufficient. Reading the tale, the parent should talk with the child on the ways to behave pragmatically and provide him or her with real-life examples where the child demonstrates these behaviors. For example, the parent can say something like, “Remember when you felt that the piano lessons are hard and you wanted to quit? Remember how you overcame the difficulty, resulting with a wonderful concert? I am very proud of you.” All in all, research concludes that pointing out positive behaviors has a larger, sustainable effect on a child character as he/she grows up, as opposed to mentioning the absence of these behaviors

Moving on to the second island, we meet the “Respect a lot Island.” This island represents the Social-ethical subsystem. The people on this island are kind and behave with respect towards each other. While reading this part, parents can talk with their children about the ways we believe people “have to behave” in society. It is a good opportunity to talk about friendship, honesty, partnership and other values in this category that the parents believe in. As on the first island, the three children in the journey experience again that as much as those values are important, they are part of a bigger picture.

Flying to the last island, the reader experiences along with the three children the importance of happiness and joy in life. Visiting “Fun-La-La-Land Island,” the parent should check with his/her child what are the things that make them happy. Once they agree on these things, they should schedule together certain activities every day that will enable these things to happen. This is an excellent benchmark in the tale, where parents can start combining the three values’ categories – visioning how we can plan pragmatically our day, in order to respect and take into account what makes us both ethical and happy.

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While heading back home, the children, both in the tale and the readers, understands the lesson for pursuing life happiness and productivity – “we need balance in our life.” We need all three elements in order to build our value system and engage in a fulfilling life. The parents should embrace this message too.

The second reading of the tale

As mentioned earlier, children love repeating the same tale over and over. When reading the tale again, parents can focus after every visit on an island, on two or three things that are important to them, in order to succeed in the values that this island represents. It is a good idea to let the parents choose, together with their child, the values they want to instill in each category. Parents can combine the tale with the card game and select a given value from the list of values presented. On each card, there is a distinguished colored ball, indicating a specific value subsystem. The red ball indicates the pragmatic subsystem, blue is the ethical subsystem, and green represents the emotional subsystem. After the parent finishes reading the tale and chooses the values (hopefully jointly with the child), they can engage on their own adventure. Together, they can retrospect on the ways they behaved by the three island values in the past weeks and decide what they can do differently, now that they learned the importance of the balance.

It is recommended that parents make the tale a bedtime story. Every night, before the parent puts his child to sleep, he/she should read with the child the tale and talk with him/her about the day that went by and the one that comes tomorrow. This is a way to “walk the talk” and make the “value talk”; it becomes a vivid ancillary language. This is the best way to instill values in your child’s life.

Games that bring the tale to life

The pioneering developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky thought that play is the leading source of development in children\textsuperscript{10}. Many other psychologists talked about the

advantages of playing and playfulness\textsuperscript{11}. Children learn best through active, exploratory play (sometimes guided by an adult) rather than through direct, lecture-style instruction. Games are a wonderful way for having fun and exploring what is important in life. As so, games are a fantastic rich way to “walk the talk” of a balanced value system. Through games, we can balance the three value categories, while enabling the parent or the coach to succeed in communicating and influencing the value selection in an enjoyable manner. In telling the story of the “magic carpet and the islands of values,” some games can be added and make the learning fun and enjoyable. Hereafter, we present two short games that we have crafted and used in our coaching practices in complementing the tale as well as the “Value of Values” card game.

The first game we recommend is the "\textbf{My Life Color Game}\textsuperscript{12}". In order to play this game the parent has to use the three island colors, red, blue and green. He can use food coloring, water colors or colored sand, alongside a small bottle. Now that the child understands the values of every island, he can choose the balance of his own life. The parent should guide the child to take the quantity of red color he would like to have in his life by asking how much pragmatic behavior is important to him. Let him put it in the bottle. While doing so, the parent should talk to him/her about the pragmatic values he/she wants to adopt, raising a few examples. Once the child is done with the red color, continue to the blue ethical island and then to the green, the emotional island. The child will end up with a colorful bottle that represents his unique balance of values. If you play the game with a number of kids, they can see the different balance color each child chose for him/her.

The second game the parent is encouraged to play with his child is the "\textbf{Island Dance Game}.” For playing this game the parent has to build the three islands using colored clothes. The parent can do a couple of things using those islands, all for the purpose of illustrating the value system in general, and the three subsystems in particular. When the parent and the child describe the day’s events, they do it “dancing” on the colored cloth-made islands. Every time the parent talks about something pragmatic, he should stand on the red island, when he talks about the social part of the event, he should hop


\textsuperscript{12} Note: My Life Color Game and the Island Dance Game have been developed by Anat Garti. Kindly provide proper credit line if and when you decide to use it © 2014.
to the blue island and so on. For example, (standing on the green island) “This morning I was frustrated.” (jumping to the red island) “Everything went wrong, I got up late, the clothes I wanted to wear were wrinkled, I didn’t find the material for the presentation and got late to an important meeting.” (jumping to the blue island) “My good friend Rose calmed me down; she always knows what to say to make me feel good; she is a real caring friend.” After the parent demonstrates his “island dance,” his child will then engage on his “island dance.” Dancing the “island dance,” the child can learn a lot about what is important to him and how he could behave differently in order to succeed and be happy in his life. The parent can use the same “island dance,” while reading a story and asking him to jump between the islands according to the context of the story.

These two samples provide ways to instill values through games. We encourage the parent to get in touch with his “inner” child, be creative and invent his/her own value games. Playing is a natural form of expression in children.

**Conclusion**

Tales and games are not just for children. Adults need them, too. Stories and games make us believe that we can conquer our fears, work hard and achieve whatever we are set out to. When an unattractive person finds success with talent we applaud that. When a disabled person rises above the disability to achieve in life and business, we are pleased. These are the human fairy tales that are good, and teach us about the higher qualities of ourselves and of others. They give us hope for the future. We look for, and long for, fairy tale folks in our lives for many reasons; much of which has to do with getting out of our problems and our small universes into a bigger world where there is hope and goodness. Some contemporary leaders became legendary while they were still alive, and there are many stories floating around their deeds, courageous actions and values. Examples include such political leaders as Nelson Mandela, or some leading industrial figures.

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13. Gamification, or the use of game elements to promote desired behaviors among customers and employees, has been a popular business strategy for decades. However, with the increase use and development of technology, there seem to be an explosion in their use. It is evident in the popularity of games for both children and adults using the mobile technology. It is becoming a big industry.

The world is seeking forms and methods to be used in instilling values in children. The tale discussed here, is only one such example. There are also some more formal and institutional examples that are worth mentioning. The Human Values Foundation, for example, was established in 1995 to make available worldwide, a comprehensive values-themed program for children from 4 to 12 years, entitled EDUCATION IN HUMAN VALUES (EHV). Its fully resourced lesson plans utilize familiar teaching techniques of discussion, storytelling, quotations, group singing, and other activities to reinforce values and life learning. The program enables children to put into practice a wide spectrum of values with the potential to enrich their lives. Through the experiential learning, over time participants develop a well-considered personal morality, all the while gaining invaluable emotional and social skills to help them lead happy, fulfilled, successful lives.

Sheherazade is a EU Project that emphasizes storytelling as a pedagogical tool in formal and non-formal adult learning as an educational strategy. They argue that education and training approaches involving storytelling not only tackle language and social cohesion competences, but also fit the competence driven approaches for adult learning\(^{15}\).

It is not just good stories, however, that are part of the fairy tales we seek or use in instilling values. Evil in the world is also part of the fairy tales we learn. There is also a beast with beauty, or the evil troll under the bridge that can catch the hero and cause trouble. There are wolves that can enter a home, eat grandma and wait for Little Red Riding Hood to come in to get her, too. Stories like that make our own lives look less hard. There are always people in worse shape, we can see; and so our own lives don't appear to be as difficult. We can project our anger and frustration on figures that are unlikeable for that reason.

Our personal lives are like fairy tales. We use the descriptions found in them to describe the events in our lives. We talk about going down long roads, about the twists and turns and dramas in our journeys in fairy-tale terms because we are able to see our lives apart from ourselves in order to interpret their meanings. We refer to the man we seek for love as a "Prince Charming" and women we think are ugly or mean as witches. Again, this allows us to label so others can understand and we have a way to discharge our feelings.

\(^{15}\) See: [http://www.sheherazade.eu/](http://www.sheherazade.eu/)
Coaches and therapists sometimes use fairy tales in coaching sessions or therapy. In ancient Eastern cultures, storytelling was used as a gentle yet powerful form of therapy. The stories can provide a source of comfort for the coachee. The help can take many forms – a fairy godmother, a guardian angel, a Buddha – or perhaps some sort of figure who stands on the shoulder and whispers advise to the ear, the tradition from the East has been carried very successfully into contemporary coaching practices. Coaches have for sometimes, accepted and used storytelling as an effective yet non-invasive form of coaching. In more clinical settings, it has been said that the renowned psychologist Milton Erikson used tales that will amuse, surprise or even shock his patients in an attempt to affect changes in their lives. Today, even the Neuro-Linguistic Program (NLP) of coaching or the Gestalt school of thought, include stories and metaphors as part of their toolkit for creative thinking and problem solving. We should not forget that fairy tales that become real make us remember our childhood, the surprises and joy we felt when we learned that a character lived happily ever after.

In sum, talking about values is not easy. And an attempt to instill values is even harder. In this paper, we have attempted to combine storytelling and simple games to be used as effective tools to instill values in children. The ideas and examples discussed in this paper are by no means exhaustive. Nevertheless, the foundations are based on many years of research and practice, and we hope that this paper will be instrumental for those of you who are in search for methodologies and tools to instill values and make “living” a cherished passage in your lives and the lives of the people you wish to help or care about.